

Think before you press

Carole Spiers urges care and courtesy when sending emails



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SONYA IS A SALES manager, a position that has taken her over 10 years to attain. She prides herself on her communication skills, but at her recent appraisal meeting with her boss she was told that her formal and blunt emailing style needed to be more 'friendly'. She was very surprised and argued that the quantity of email she had to deal with each day meant that each one had to be dealt with quickly, with no real time for pleasantries.

Firstly, could Sonya's blunt email messages be taken by a recipient as a form of 'cyber bullying'? The answer to this is no. Cyber bullying has been established in law as writing with the intent to humiliate an individual by publishing adverse comment about them.

But Sonya's behaviour is still damaging. Although she never bullies, her email style is so terse that it is often taken as unfriendly by recipients, leaving them feeling alienated rather than valued.

Many of us, like Sonya, receive over 50 emails a day and our aim is to try to clear our inbox as quickly as possible, but in our haste we may write in a way that can offend. Far too many emails are 'wacked out', with no subject header and just the bare message, which often appears abrupt to the recipient. So how can we find the line between a commendably efficient and businesslike email style and one that might be mistaken as hostile?

Although many of us have to arrive at the office early, or stay late, just to clear our email backlog, we

must still be aware of how we write and how the message will look to others. It is important to appear polite. Cast your mind back, if you are old enough, to the days when you would receive letters by mail with a personalised greeting and a handwritten signature. Although such correspondence is largely a thing of the past, the courtesies it displayed need not be. They were appreciated by recipients then and will be today too.

The next time you are about to hit the 'send' button, re-read your message. You may not mean to, but all too easily you can sound terse or aggressive. With one click of a button, the message has gone, never to be retrieved. As a result, your recipient reads what appears to be a critical message from you that may cause them anxiety or distress, which was never your intention.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

- Never answer email if you are angry or emotional. If you wish to 'let off steam', then do so but put the email into your 'draft' box overnight, as you may not wish to send it in the morning!
- When you have written your email, read it as if you were the person receiving it.
- Take time to add praise or appreciation where merited, using phrases such as 'you have done a great job' and, simplest of all, 'many thanks'.
- Don't copy in your emails or texts to the whole office when you don't need to.
- Don't send out emails late at night and set a poor example for working long hours.
- Don't make your messages 'high-priority' unless they really are urgent.
- If you need to be direct with someone, consider the best words to use before you write them – better still, pick up the phone.
- If you have sent an email and are not happy with what you have written, again, pick up the phone and tell them in advance.

If you manage your emails and texts courteously, offering praise and appreciation at the appropriate time, then when you do need to bring attention to something that has gone wrong, the recipient will be less likely to react badly.

With all the pressures that we experience at work, email can be an extremely efficient method of communication but it can also become a hazard. Handle it with care.

Carole Spiers is a motivational speaker and stress management expert. She speaks regularly at ISMM events and is author of *Show stress who's boss!* available at the special price of £10 for *Winning Edge* readers (RRP £15.00). To order a copy, go to www.showstresswhosboss.co.uk and enter 'sswbthird' in the promotional code box in the shopping cart. Visit www.carolespiersgroup.co.uk